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The Reasonableness and Advantage of allowing  
Ministers to deliver their Sentiments with  
Freedom.

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Represented in a  
**S E R M O N**  
Preached at the  
**ORDINATION**  
OF THE  
Rev. Mr. *Caleb Rotheram*,  
A T

*Kendal*, on the 26<sup>th</sup> of *August*, 1756.

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By S. L O W T H I O N.

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Published at the unanimous Request of the  
Ministers and People who heard it.

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Jam nihil est, quod quisquam aut tam Stultus, aut tam im-  
probus sit, qui dicat, VELLEM QUIDEM LICERET: HOC  
DIXISSEM: dicas licet—modo rectè, omnes approbabunt.

CICERO.

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*L O N D O N:*

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M D C C L V I I I .





## ACTS ii. 29.

*Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you.*

\*\*\*\*\* A R I O U S were the discouragements and difficulties, which the first preachers of Christianity had to encounter. The *Jews* (to whom they were first to deliver their message) were closely attached to that system of religion which *Moses* had established, and scrupulously zealous for every ritual punctilio. To attempt the setting aside, or invalidating these, they looked upon, as an insufferable insult upon them and their ancestors, especially upon their great legislator, and an impious encroachment upon their sacred constitution. To assert, or suggest, that the customs which *Moses* had delivered were to be changed, was, in their esteem, nothing less than blasphemy, cognizable by their

Acts vi.  
13, 14.

council, and deserving the most exemplary punishment. And, considering the evidence they had that their religion was appointed and established by divine authority, that their lawgiver was commissioned and instructed in an extraordinary manner, and that they had long continued the peculiar people of God, to whom great and special promises had been made ; they might reasonably expect and insist upon it, that whoever undertook to abolish or change the usages or doctrines which *Moses* had prescribed and taught, should give undeniable proof of being properly authorized so to do. Nothing less than the most incontestable evidence, that the system, which was to take place of theirs, came from God, and that it was, by him, intended to supersede *the law of commandments contained in ordinances*, could justly give them satisfaction. Of this they had abundant testimony, had they honestly attended to it ; since most of their types and figures, as also their prophets, manifestly pointed out, and spoke of, the author of a more glorious dispensation as the great prophet to whom they were to hearken ; and, moreover, God bare witness, by the most illustrious

illustrious and indisputable miracles, that *Jesus of Nazareth* was sent by him. But they had suffered their religion to degenerate into mere external performances, insignificant ceremonies, and empty rites of their own inventing, of which they were more tenacious and observant than of the weightier *matters of the law*; and the consequence of this was, that they were averse to, and prejudiced against, genuine piety and rational religion. The corruptions into which they were fallen had induced a blindness of mind and a perverseness of disposition, which incapacitated, or, at least, sadly disqualifed them for moral instruction. Their ignorance, their pride and selfishness made them oppose all methods for a reformation; and caused them to look upon such as recommended purity of heart and a virtuous conduct, with jealousy and resentment. Thus circumstanced, it must appear, to every considerate person, a matter of very great difficulty, to rectify their mistakes, and persuade them to embrace a religion almost entirely spiritual. Having been taught to believe, that, as the descendants of *Abraham*, they were secure of the divine favor, they would

would not easily be brought to see the necessity of personal holiness. As they had been long accustomed to pomp and show, external purifications, and ostentatious devotions, a system of religion, requiring inward good dispositions, and pronouncing all other things of no manner of value without them, was likely to meet with a very cold reception ; especially when recommended by the professed disciples of him, whom they had lately maliciously put to death.

As to the rest of the nations, they were sunk into the grossest idolatry, bewildered in false philosophy, and *by wisdom knew not God*. Unto them, the doctrine of salvation through a crucified redeemer, was likely to seem no better than foolishness, and to be rejected at once, as repugnant to reason, inconsistent with the sentiments of their wisest and most celebrated men, and what could never be espoused or professed by any but weak and credulous enthusiasts. They were accustomed, in their several schools of philosophy, to curious speculations, intricate subtleties, doubtful disputations, or florid harangues ; which, in all probability, would render

render the plainness and simplicity of the Gospel disgusting and contemptible. Their various deities, their numerous rites and ceremonies, (most of which were ridiculous, and not a few of them scandalously immoral,) in all likelihood, would cause them to reject the important doctrines, that there is one God, and that he is to be worshipped, through one mediator, in spirit and in truth, as too simple and unadorned. In short ; through idolatrous and debauched principles and practices, *they were become vain in their imaginations, their foolish hearts were darkened*, their minds grown undiscerning, and *they were dead in trespasses and sins.*

Mankind being in such a situation, how discouraging an undertaking must it have been to attempt their instruction and reformation ? What less can be supposed necessary to have engaged any in this work, than an inward firm persuasion that they should be favoured with extraordinary divine assistance ? Can any probable reason be assigned, why the disciples of a crucified master should undertake it, unless it be supposed that they were influenced thereto by a thorough conviction

vision of the truth and importance of Christianity, a zeal for the glory of God, and a benevolent concern for the happiness of mankind? The charge of credulity or weakness, knavery or imposture, can never be justly fixed upon the first preachers of the Gospel; since in their reasonings, they manifested themselves men of good sense, of sober minds, and solid judgments; and by their conduct, most significantly evinced, that they had no sinister or selfish ends in view. With the most inflexible steadiness, the most undisguised openness and freedom, and the most perfect and harmonious consistency, did they persevere in declaring and vindicating the great and essential doctrines of Christianity, however opposite to the received prejudications of *Jews* or *Gentiles*: and, in so doing, acted as became men of honor and honesty; and are noble instances of resolution, fidelity, and uprightness to all who sustain the character of public teachers, who are set to maintain and inculcate pure religion, explain and support the truth as it is in *Jesus*, and vindicate the dispensations of heaven as just, and wise, and good. Thus *Peter*, in the midst of a promiscuous assem-

bly, stood forth, boldly avowing the truth and certainty of a grand and fundamental article of that religion which was now to be published to the world, *viz.* the resurrection of *Christ* from the dead ; and requested of the *Jews*, in particular, that they would permit him freely to speak unto them ; and, without prejudice or passion, suffer him to show, from ancient prophecies, that *Christ* was to be raised from the dead, as, in fact, he had been ; and point out the unreasonableness of applying those predictions and promises to *David*, which referred to, and were fulfilled in, the person and character of *Christ* only ; whom God had raised up, and whom they might assuredly know he had made both *Lord* and *Christ*.

In order to preclude as much as possible, all cavils or exceptions against what shall be afterwards advanced, I beg leave to premise, that—‘ the laity have a right to judge, ‘ by reason and scripture, with moderation and ‘ candour, of what their ministers, from time ‘ to time, advance, either in public discourses ‘ or private conversation.’ Most readily do we grant, that you are allowed to consider

*The reasonableness of*

what we say ; to weigh the reasons we offer, and the arguments we urge ; to examine our assertions, and the proofs we adduce in support of them ; to doubt, where the evidence is not clear ; and to object, where you apprehend we are mistaken. Nay, we affirm it is your *duty* and *interest* to do this ; and that you cannot neglect it, without prejudice to the cause of piety and truth, and discovering a reproachful unconcernedness for your own improvement : for this you may depend upon as a sure maxim ; — ‘ inattention and ‘ carelessness in hearers have a tendency to ‘ render preachers indolent, superficial and ‘ imposing.’ Whenever the Christian laity grew unconcerned or indifferent what principles their teachers inculcated ; whenever they began implicitly to receive whatsoever they advanced, and stupidly to venerate the ministerial character ; whenever they suffered their minds to be brought into a servile and senseless subjection to priestly authority, and omitted to think, and reason, and judge for themselves ; they presently sunk into the most barbarous ignorance, were overwhelmed with the grossest superstition, and befooled by the most scandalous delusions. Or even supposing

sing there was no danger of this; but, on the contrary, the utmost security that ministers would continue diligent and honest, notwithstanding the negligence or inadvertency of the laity; yet, what good end could their repeated instructions answer, if not attended to and considered? To what purpose shall they reason or argue upon any point, if those who hear them do not judge of what they say? What can the most powerful motives avail, if not deliberately weighed by those to whom they are propounded? What can teaching signify, if those who should learn give no heed to what is spoken? While this is the case, the best means must be ineffectual; and men must continue ignorant under the fairest advantages of attaining knowledge. We are willing to allow farther, that, by carefully attending to, and candidly criticising, our performances, you do *us* signal service. The apprehension of your doing this is a spur to diligence, an incentive to application, and a constant memento to be as careful as we can that what we offer to your examination be judicious and accurate. The consideration that our discourses will be heard with attention, and reflected upon with se-

*The reasonableness of*

riousness ; that what we deliver in public we may be amicably called upon to defend in private ; and that to be convicted of having been fluent without sense, or positive without proof, must expose us to contempt, and fix upon us the odious charge of ignorance or bigotry ; will make us cautious in our assertions, and render us studiously careful that our positions be not inconsistent, nor our reasoning inconclusive. In fine ; by such a proceeding, the purity of religion is most effectually preserved ; you personally profit by the word preached ; and your ministers are excited to pursue their studies with unremitting industry, and inspired with a laudable ambition of approving themselves *workmen who need not to be ashamed.*

All this, we very chearfully acknowledge, is *your* unalienable right and indispensable duty. This right we earnestly desire you to preserve inviolable ; to consider it as your noblest privilege ; and in the spirit of Christian charity to exert and exercise it constantly for the maintenance of truth and virtue. Let no pretensions to any sacredness of character, no supposed or real superiority in point of learning

learning or piety, induce you, in any measure to give it up. Continue to *prove all things*; and judge of doctrines whether they are agreeable to reason and the word of God, by whomsoever advanced. Let your professed assent be the result of rational conviction; and the religious principles you espouse be founded in a clear discernment of their truth and importance. After these concessions, we hope, you will as readily admit, that *we* have a right, and that it is our indispensable duty, to speak unto you with unreserved openness and freedom, not keeping back any thing which we apprehend to be profitable for you, nor shunning to *declare the whole counsel of God*; and that it is your wisdom and interest to permit and encourage us so to do. To evince and inculcate this, is the principal design of the following discourse; as a foundation for which I have pitched upon those words of *Peter*, *Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you*: and in treating upon them, I shall endeavour;

I. To shew the reasonableness and necessity of thus speaking.

II.

II. To guard against any abuse of this licence, by considering with what restrictions or limitations it ought to be used.

III. To obviate some of the chief objections which may be urged against it.

I. Let us enquire how reasonable and necessary it is, that ministers should be allowed and encouraged to speak their sentiments with freedom and plainness.

'Tis presumed it will be readily granted, that ministers, as well as people, ought to form their sentiments and principles upon diligent and impartial examination and enquiry. They, surely, may claim the right of judging for themselves, in common with the rest of mankind. They are personally answerable for their opinions, and tenets, as well as other men; and ought therefore, in all justice, to be allowed the full liberty of making the best use and improvement they can of the faculties with which they are endowed, or the opportunities with which they may be favoured. But, considering their station and employment, they, of all men, ought

ought to be the most careful and critical in searching after truth, in *proving all things, and trying doctrines and spirits, whether they are of God.* This is their business and duty, in a peculiar and an appropriate sense, to neglect which is highly criminal ; since, by such an omission, they remain incapable of detecting falsehood, or vindicating truth. But, to what purpose, as to the public, their studious enquiries ; to what purpose their improvements in knowledge, their more perfect acquaintance with moral and religious subjects, their clearer discernment of the reasonableness and excellency of the Christian scheme, or their detecting error and absurdity ; if they are not permitted freely to impart their discoveries to the world ; or, at least, to those over whom they are placed as instructors and guides ? The reasonableness and expediency of ministers speaking freely results, therefore ;

1.) From the very nature of that office in which they are placed ; as requiring, in general, that they teach and instruct mankind.

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They who are thus employed (be their particular profession what it will) should be allowed full liberty to explain and illustrate such subjects as come properly before them; and to use all the methods in their power to enable those who attend upon them clearly and fully to understand their meaning. Scarce any thing can be imagined more preposterous or imprudent than to forbid or discourage them from doing this; since it is manifestly opposing them in the prosecution of that, which, at the same time, we request and require them to perform; and defeating that very end which we profess to have in view, *viz.* a more comprehensive and perfect knowledge of those things in which they have undertaken to instruct us. In no one instance, that of *religious* instruction excepted, do men act so perverse and foolish a part. They are found, for the most part, readily and thankfully to embrace the best opportunities and means of information and improvement; and gratefully to acknowledge themselves obliged to those who show them wherein their mistake lay, and how they may rectify it. Are not those always preferred, in any other of the liberal arts or sciences,

sciences, who speak in the most plain and intelligible manner ; who do not intentionally conceal what they ought to communicate ; nor ignorantly perplex what they should explain ? And why, then, should the teachers of religion be cramped and fettered ? Why should they be obliged to be reserved, ambiguous, or mysterious ? Why must the most important truths be muffled up in darkness and obscurity ; and the christian scheme (in itself, every way rational and excellent,) be suffered to remain under all those deformities, which ignorance, bigotry, or craft have cast upon it ? Why must not this most amiable and invaluable system be represented in it's native and engaging simplicity and beauty ? If plainness and perspicuity be desirable in any case, they are certainly so in this : for nothing does it more nearly concern us rightly to understand than, — Wherein the perfection and happiness of our nature consist ; — and how we may most successfully pursue, and effectually secure these. We therefore plead for the liberty of speaking freely, not only, as it is what all teachers in general, may lay claim to ; but,

2.) From the consideration of those instructions, which it is our immediate business to give you ; and of those bad consequences with which our being abridged of it must unavoidably be attended ; both as to you, in particular, and as to the interest of Christianity in general.

Did the doctrines which we are to deliver, explain, and inculcate, relate merely to your bodily welfare, were they only maxims of human prudence ; or directions about the management of your worldly concerns ; scrupulous exactness might better be dispensed with ; though we should deserve very ill at your hands, if we did not, even in that case, inform you to the best of our judgment, after you had requested us, and we had engaged, so to do : but, seeing they relate to your spiritual and everlasting happiness, and the principles of piety and virtue, must thrive or decline in your hearts according as they are received or rejected, rightly understood or unhappily mistaken ; you must allow it is of the last consequence that, in laying them before you, we be ingenuously plain and impartial.

partial. That the principles we are to recommend to your regards have such a reference as this, is very obvious. For, with what intent do people send for, attend on, or support ministers? Is it not, should it not be, with an intention and desire to hear all things which are commanded of God; to have the great duties of religion more fully illustrated; and the motives to obedience urged in the most powerful and persuasive manner? With what design do people frequent public religious assemblies, or hear moral discourses, but to have their understandings farther enlightened, their stock of knowledge enlarged, and their good dispositions improved? These, one may suppose, are the ends which any will avow, in this case; at least, they are the only ends which any can pretend to justify. The question, then, is: — ‘ How may these ends be most successfully prosecuted, and most fully answered?’ Surely not by prohibiting or discouraging ministers from delivering their sentiments frankly and openly upon every subject they handle; not by dictating to instructors how, or what they shall speak; nor any way deterring those from being plain and explicit, who devote their time

to reading and meditation with this very view, *viz.* that they may be continually more able to teach others.

An excellent writer very justly observes, “Christianity is no more to be learned all at once by the minister, than by the private members of the congregation \*.” You must allow us time, as well as yourselves, to make progress in knowledge, and arrive at higher attainments in religion. You must do so, if you expect our discourses should grow more judicious and edifying. But, if once you take upon you peremptorily to prescribe in what track we shall think, upon what topics we shall dwell, and in what manner we shall treat them, you effectually preclude our farther improvement; or, at least, as to yourselves, render it wholly useless. If people confine their ministers to certain favourite points, to a particular system, and a select set of principles, from which they are not to vary, what advantage can they reasonably hope for, from their studies? Must they not go on in a dull round of periodical repetitions,

\* Dr. *Foster*, on natural religion and social virtue: Vol. II. p. 218.

ons, not more easy to the preacher, than lifeless and unedifying to a sensible hearer? And it deserves to be considered, whether this is not one principal cause of that superficialness, so commonly complained of, in our public performances. To every received doctrine, or the explanation of it, there belongs a number of set phrases, and trite expressions; which, however little to the purpose, or unintelligible in themselves, are become so familiar to the ears of many, that they pass, not only without censure, but with applause; especially when set off with some exclamatory warmth, or larded with a few invectives against those who are supposed to think differently: these are perpetually occurring to the mind of the composer, or speaker; and (if he can content himself with them) may serve very well to make up a considerable part of his discourse. Little more seems necessary, upon this plan, in order to equip a man for the pulpit, than a general acquaintance with a few capital doctrines, and being apprized in what sense they are to be maintained, which he may soon learn from some leading, self-conceited, pragmatical zealots; an indifferent memory; or at most, a common

mon-place-book tolerably well furnished from authenticated expositions and commentaries upon articles, confessions, and catechisms, or other admired systematical writings. This is (if I may be allowed the expression) a kind of *artificial preaching*; but seems no way adapted either to inform the judgment, or better the heart. You think, and are ready to insinuate, that we are unmindful of our character, regardless of our duty, and injurious to the public, when we squander away that time in idleness, or trifling and unprofitable amusements, which should be employed in reading or thinking, in improving our own minds, and qualifying ourselves for instructing you: but, upon supposition that we are not suffered to communicate our acquisitions, and thereby endeavour to make you wiser, as well as ourselves; what just foundation can there be for such a censure? If you give us to understand that you will be best pleased with our keeping in the beaten path, and contenting ourselves with following and retailing explanations and notions prepared to our hands; what encouragement, what occasion have we, for so much application and study? When a criterion, or standard

dard of orthodoxy is fixed, and we presume we are come up to it, why should we not rest satisfied? Why should we trouble ourselves and others farther? Or simply seek what we are in the possession of? Plain it is, such a proceeding has a tendency to render ministers less diligent and inquisitive, and to make them indulge to a lazy indifference, and an insipid uniformity; by which their own proficiency, as also that of their people, must be uncomfortably affected.

And if it be considered, that the Gospel, of which we are ministers, is a dispensation of special grace, or favor, from God to his sinful and guilty creatures here below, communicated and conducted by his only begotten and well beloved son, wherein are published and ascertained the terms, upon which they may hope for pardon, acceptance, and everlasting life; the reasonableness and necessity of what we are pleading for will appear still more clearly. We are not only to instruct you in the nature and measure of moral obligation, but to lay before you those conditions upon which a plenary remission will be granted to sinners, and the most substantial

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and indefectible happiness conferred upon them. In the doing of this, it is of the last consequence that we use all possible plainness and precision: that we do not alarm with false fears, nor sooth with groundless hopes; that we conceal not what God has required, nor insist upon what he has not made necessary. We trust, we are so far concerned for your best interest, as to be solicitously careful that you be not destroyed through lack of knowledge; and that a spirit of undissembled and generous benevolence will keep us from daubing with untempered mortar; prevent us from crying peace, when there is no peace; and effectually secure us from handling the word of the Lord deceitfully. We claim the liberty of speaking against immorality and profaneness, whoever may stand chargeable with them; of warning the wicked; of freely expostulating with presumptuous and bold transgressors; and of showing the most artful hypocrite that his *hope shall perish*, and that his *joy is but for a moment*. We must be excused from speaking smooth things to such persons; or giving them the least encouragement to hope for the favour of God and future happiness, while they continue to

practise those things, against which his wrath is revealed. No one ought to discourage a minister from exposing any vice, how nearly soever it may affect him ; for if this is done by one man, and his unreasonable demands complied with, why not by another, and so on ; 'till, at last, every vice must pass uncensured ? One can scarce imagine a greater affront offered to a minister, than to suppose him capable of thus tampering with his conscience, or of acting so mean, so unfriendly, so treacherous a part. If preachers are thus complaisant, or rather, thus timorous and cowardly, who shall be found to rebuke sin, or reprove iniquity ? Are we set as watchmen to guard, and shall we not give warning, when danger and destruction are approaching ? Are we to remain neutral and silent spectators, while ignorance and vice are gaining dominion over the minds of men ; and even over the minds of those who have chosen and requested us to consult and promote their spiritual welfare ? Would not men, in affairs relating to their characters, bodies, or estates, if they had, in any measure, committed these to our care, deem such conduct inconsistent with friendship, and even with

common honesty? Permit us, then, freely to declare; — ‘ without repentance and reformation, sincere and persevering obedience, there is no ground to hope for the pardon of sin, nor future felicity. Your happiness hereafter depends upon the right improvement of your present talents and opportunities. Your capacity of entering into, and enjoying the heavenly inheritance, must be laid in the habits of piety and virtue, established and improved by constant exercise. Your calling Christ, Lord, Lord, will avail you nothing, without doing the things which he has commanded. You can derive comfort from the promises of the Gospel, only in proportion as you are careful to obey it’s precepts. Your reliance upon the merits of Christ, if unaccompanied with the love and practice of universal righteousness and goodness, is the most absurd and dangerous presumption; but these, in conjunction, constitute the character of a consistent christian, and lay a foundation for the most joyful and animating hopes. Your believing right, while you continue to act wrong, instead of justifying, must condemn you.’ Upon these, and other interesting

resting subjects, we desire permission to expatiate with all plainness and freedom; to lay open, with all the exactness and perspicuity we are able, the terms upon which sinners may expect forgiveness; to show their reasonableness; and press to a compliance with them by such motives as seem the best calculated to influence the minds of those to whom we speak.

Let any considerate person determine, now; whether encouraging ministers in such an honest, open proceeding is not much more likely to serve the cause of truth and real Christianity, than the contrary method of prescribing to them, pinning them down to some particular system, or obliging them to make their doctrines square with creeds or summaries, drawn up by men as frail and fallible as themselves? Is it likely there will be that clearness, that life and spirit, that easy fluency, and copiousness of sentiment, in the compositions of one, who is under perpetual dread of offending, and becoming obnoxious to the displeasure of rigid systematical censures; as in his, whose mind is free from any such apprehensions, and at full liberty to

consider a subject in every light, in order justly and satisfactorily to explain it? Must not a man, in such unhappy circumstances, be induced to omit many things, and mutilate more, to guard against the captious cavils of such as he has reason to believe are laying in wait for him, and seeking to catch something out of his mouth, that they may accuse him? Is it not evident, this must be a very great embarrassment, and a strong temptation to prevaricate? And, if such a temper and practice should generally prevail, must not a most insipid formality obtain in public discourses? People usually want to be pleased as well as profited: neither of which can ever be done, without allowing free scope to the judgment and invention of the person appointed to instruct. If we are cheerfully allowed to bring forth things both new and old, to expatiate unconfined upon the great topics of morality and the glorious themes of pure Christianity; if we are permitted and encouraged fully to state their evidence, illustrate their reasonableness, and urge them upon the minds and consciences of men, by motives drawn from a sense of duty, ingenuity, and interest; we may justly be upbraided with

with a barrenness of invention, or a criminal indifference and indolence, if we do not, for the most part, make men wiser and better.

Thus, I hope, it appears, from the consideration of the general nature of our office as instructors, and from the particular character we sustain as the ministers of the Gospel; how reasonable, how advantageous, and necessary it is, that we be permitted to deliver our sentiments with all imaginable plainness and freedom, according to the best of our present judgment. And allow me to add;

3.) We must thus speak, in order to preserve a good conscience, and approve ourselves unto God. Upon any attempt to abridge us of this liberty, we beg leave to discourage and repel it, by reminding you, that *we ought to obey God rather than men*: and we desire you to judge and determine, whether it be right in the sight of God, to hearken unto you more than unto him. We are under the most solemn engagements to fidelity; through which we cannot break, without bringing ourselves into condemnation, as well as prejudicing you and the interest

interest of religion. Our own souls are at stake; and, while we exhort and admonish you, it behoves us to take care of our own integrity and virtue. Dissimulation and hypocrisy, we are very sure, are highly displeasing to the God of truth, in whomsoever they are found; but, in ministers, are peculiarly base and criminal. We can enjoy no peace, nor entertain any hope, so long as we are conscious to ourselves of suffering those to remain ignorant whom we have engaged to instruct; misleading those whom we have undertaken to guide; betraying those over whom we have solemnly promised to watch; starving those whom we ought to feed; or defrauding those who have chosen us for their stewards, in affairs most nearly concerning them. Most strictly are we enjoined,

*2 Cor. iv. 2. renounce the hidden things of dishonesty; not to walk in craftiness, nor handle the word of the Lord deceitfully; but to commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. Most awfully are we charged before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead, at his appearing and kingdom, to preach the word; to reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with all long-suffering; in doctrine*

*to show uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity ; and to use such sound speech as cannot be condemned.* Considering the importance and difficulty of our work, have we not reason to cry out, with sacred fear and humble diffidence, — *who is sufficient for these things ?* But, encouraged by the mercy and grace of God ; encouraged by your ingenuity and candour ; ambitious to plead the cause of virtue and pure Christianity ; delighted with the view of implanting and improving in the minds of our fellow-christians the principles of holiness, and thereby qualifying them for happiness ; and animated with the hope of receiving *from the chief shepherd, when he shall appear, a crown of glory which fadeth not away ; we faint not :* on the contrary, with resolution and integrity, with growing satisfaction and pleasure, we hope to do the work of evangelists, make full proof of our ministry, and finish our course with joy. And, in order to this, how ought we to act ? Thus intrusted and warned, how must we behave, so as to entertain any rational expectation of being approved and acquitted at this grand and final audit ? Keeping it in view, what, do you think, must be our principal enquiry, when

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we are preparing to lay before you any of the interesting doctrines of religion? Can you imagine it will be, — whether a plain and honest representation may not some way uncomfortably affect our temporal advantage? whether it may not disgust some, upon whose favor and friendship we depend for subsistence; incur the displeasure of our superiors; expose us to public censure; or hinder us from rising in the world? Yourselves being judges; do such deliberations seem consistent with a sincere concern that we may be approved of God? Do you think, that a minister, who is swayed by such considerations, does rightly understand, or really consult, his own highest interest? Must you not allow, that while he is thus anxious to please men, he is in very great danger of forfeiting the esteem of that Being whose prerogative it is to search the heart; and who requireth, as an indispensable condition of his favor, *truth in the inward parts?* Let any serious and unprejudiced person determine, whether, being answerable for the manner in which we execute our embassy, it does not behove us to use all plainness and impartiality; and be able always to declare, that we are *pure from*

*the*

*the blood of all, as not having shunned to declare the whole counsel of God?*

We readily admit, not only, that our commission, as ambassadours for Christ, in all it's capital articles, is contained and declared in the Scripture, and especially in the New Testament; but also that a method is prescribed how we ought to demean ourselves, in delivering our message, and acting, as it were, in Christ's stead. Being acquainted with this method, we would scrupulously adhere to it, in spite of all opposition; resting satisfied that the great shepherd and bishop of souls best knows in what manner his flock should be treated: remembering also, that *those only shall be crowned who strive lawfully.* At the same time, therefore, that we claim the liberty of speaking our sentiments freely, we would regulate ourselves, in this particular, by the dictates of reason and the prescriptions of the Gospel; and carefully avoid whatever seems inconsistent with these, or with the well known rules of decency and good manners. This carries me on to the second thing I proposed; *viz.*

II. To guard against any abuse of this licence, by considering with what restrictions or limitations it ought to be used. And ;

1.) We should not advance, nor endeavour to maintain, any doctrines or principles, without deliberately considering them, and being firmly persuaded of their truth. It becomes us to take what care we can, that our positions be agreeable to reason and the word of God, and deliberately to examine and compare them, before we positively assert they are so. The pulpit is not a fit place for delivering random conjectures, hasty sentiments, or crude and indigested thoughts. 'Tis not a place which privileges nonsense, or gives a man a liberty of saying whatever may come into his head. A congregation assembled for the important and solemn exercises of religion ; and, as to that part we are now speaking of, with a view and desire to be still farther instructed, better to understand the principles of their profession, and more clearly discern the tendency they have to improve their virtue, and promote their happiness, should not be entertained in so sorry

forry a manner. *Entertained*, did I say! I should rather have said, *abused and affronted*; for a gross abuse and a vile affront it is, to be put off with loose and empty harangues, rambling and incoherent declamations, instead of substantial, connected and methodical reasoning. Where we are doubtful and unsatisfied ourselves, we ought not to be rash in pronouncing; but take more leisure and pains to gain and give clearer conviction. Indeed, when a point, concerning which we may be in some suspense, comes naturally in our way, you ought to allow a present conjectural explanation; but integrity and faithfulness obliges us to deliver it explicitly as such: and they must be little acquainted with moral or religious subjects, who are not sensible that such do frequently occur, especially to younger ministers. When in points of an obscure and difficult nature, a man is forwardly positive, it argues a precipitancy of judgment inconsistent with an impartial enquiry after truth, and indicates but too plainly that he has enlisted himself into a party. We should come prepared to speak unto you in such a manner, as not to be afraid of your complying with the exhortation, *to the law* *Isaiah viii.*

*and to the testimony* : or, to accommodate it to the more glorious dispensation of which we are ministers, *to Christ and to his apostles* : and if we speak not according to their words, we acknowledge ourselves worthy of reprehension : we will thank you for your friendly animadversions ; and gratefully receive farther light and information. In the mean time, we acknowledge it obligatory upon us to frame and deliver our sentiments with all the care and deliberation we are capable of ; remembering that it is a folly, which must ever be accompanied with shame, to answer a matter before it is understood.

2.) The liberty we have been pleading for does not authorize us to introduce our own private quarrels or secret grudges into our public performances. This ('tis to be fear'd) is but too common a practice ; especially where a minister happens to be of a somewhat proud and hasty temper ; and has, at the same time, a turn for ridicule and satyr. With his spirits in a ferment, and keen resentment in his mind, he sets to work to lash, with all the smartness and severity he is master of, such as he imagines have treated him with

with unfairness or disrespect; and seizes an opportunity of exposing them when they have not the liberty of answering for themselves, though his reflections or insinuations may be so directly pointed as to make it tantamount to his saying, *Thou art the man.* Such a touchiness and acrimony of temper are a shame and reproach to any Christian: but, for a minister to indulge them, suffer them to accompany him into his closet, and enter into his compositions for the pulpit, is peculiarly incongruous. What has the public to do with our incidental differences? Or what reason is there to suppose men will patiently bear to hear themselves scolded and railed at from the pulpit, if ministers cannot put up with trifling affronts or injuries? Is it to be expected they will contentedly remain the butt of virulence, or the objects of open censure, for what scarcely deserved a private admonition, or friendly rebuke? Our Saviour's instruction is, that, if one brother trespass against another, the aggrieved party should go to the offender, tell him his fault between themselves two, and by private amicable expostulation endeavour to gain over his brother to friendship and a right behaviour.

Matth.Surely, xviii. 15.

Surely, then, ministers should not take the liberty of immediately proclaiming the faults or indiscretions of their fellow-christians, nor make them the topics of public declamation through personal or private pique and resentment. This is shamefully inconsistent with our character, arguing us destitute of that meekness and charity of which we are required to be examples; and an open violation of the common rules of decency and good manners. Such a proceeding will disgust every sensible hearer; and those against whom our invectives are pointed are much more likely to be irritated than convinced. But if, while we are showing the malignity and baseness, the bad tendency and fatal effects of any particular vice, (in doing of which it does not appear that we have any other than a benevolent design) some persons shall find themselves particularly concerned, we desire they would consider it as a word spoken in due season, as a timely and providential caution; and be thereby induced seriously to consider their ways, and break off their sins by sincere repentance.

3.) Notwithstanding we claim the liberty of speaking our own sentiments with freedom, we acknowledge we ought to do it with modesty and candour; especially when we see reason to differ from men of eminent piety and learning. We claim no liberty of bringing railing accusations against our brethren. We have a right (and we will assert and exercise it) to examine and judge how far the principles or doctrines they have advanced are correspondent to reason and the word of God; and that more especially when their positions or interpretations are put almost upon a level with the sacred Scriptures, and imprudently made a standard of orthodoxy. When this is the case, it becomes our duty to point out their mistakes and inconsistencies, and show they were but men, frail and fallible as others; that so mankind may be restrained from sacrificing the rights of conscience, the credit of the Gospel, and the glorious cause of liberty, to their character and influence. And, by the way, this consideration suggests a piece of prudential instruction to such as are so fond of some great name, as to make it of a kind of oracular authority; viz. that they thereby

by render the character they so much admire obnoxious to a stricter scrutiny than the generality can well admit of; and lay the friends of liberty under a kind of necessity to expose imperfections and blemishes which might, otherwise, have been forgotten or concealed. Had not the particular admirers of a certain eminent reformer been over and above zealous in this respect, it might have remained, in a great measure, a secret, that he had the chief hand in cruelly persecuting, and, at last, burning a man, for differing from him in a point, concerning which Christians, have not, for many centuries, been agreed. But to return. When we find ourselves obliged to dissent from those who have gone before us, we ought to do it with decency and respect. Ill does it become a preacher of the Gospel to call names and use scurrilous language; to pronounce others apostates, dangerous heretics, or *deniers of the Lord who bought them*; or endeavour to lessen their usefulness and comfort; because they do not coincide with them in some particular sentiments or modes of expression. Can the ministerial character give a licence to defame or abuse others? or the pulpit be deemed

deemed a secure retreat, from whence to vent spiteful reflections, retail scandal, or endeavour the ruining the reputation of the living or the dead? This is a freedom, which neither the Christian religion, humanity, nor common civility can allow; nor can it be approved of, or patiently tolerated, by any but such as are so unhappy as imagine, that it is an essential part of Christian zeal to vilify, and endeavour to run down, all but their own party; concerning whom I shall only say, *The Lord rebuke them.* Happy it is for many, that the present age can distinguish between arguing and railing; between a man's proving his own professed principles accordant with reason and the word of God, and loading others with uncharitable censures for departing from some commonly received opinions. Happy it is for the friends of liberty and genuine Christianity, that those outcries, which used formerly to raise such dreadful alarms and mischievous commotions, pass, in a great measure, unregarded; and serve for little more than to supply a barren invention, or timely discover the dispositions of those who are so wicked, or so weak, as to raise them.

In short; at the same time that we would contend earnestly for the faith, we stand obliged to guard against and suppress all envy, strife, and evil surmisings: and in meekness to instruct such as may not yet be convinced of the truth. It becomes us to be gentle towards all men, patient, and readily disposed to teach; and, instead of brawling and dissension, to recommend, both by doctrine and example, mutual forbearance and charity.

Under these restrictions we own ourselves laid by the very dispensation of which we are ministers; nor would we so much as wish to be exempt from them. The prescriptions for our public and private behaviour in the church of Christ we acknowledge to be perfectly wise and benevolent; and, regulating ourselves by them, we desire, from time to time, to address you with that freedom and plainness which are natural to truth, and suitable to the simplicity of the Gospel. This, we apprehend, is a most equitable claim, the fairest and most advantageous method of proceeding; as will, 'tis hoped, still

still more fully appear from the last thing proposed ; which was,

III. To consider, and endeavour to obviate, some objections, which may be urged against allowing ministers thus freely to deliver their sentiments. And it may be pretended.

1.) That such an indulgence is opening the way to all kinds of error ; and that the faith of private christians, and even the church in general, must ever be in a variable, fluctuating, and tumultuous state, by allowing such a licence as this. If every minister may advance his own private notions, and inculcate them upon the people, what various and discordant doctrines must there be ; and what confusion will they cause in the minds of men ? Is it not much more adviseable that there should be a set of select and generally received principles, concerning which there shall be no disputes, alterations, or questions raised, nor any farther curious search made, or permitted ?

To this we beg leave to answer, by observing ; — ' a free inquiry is so far from

‘ tending to the corruption of religion, that it is the best preservative against it.’ Men will never embrace nor profess an error, merely as such; whereas ’tis plain, that temporal advantages annexed to the profession of certain doctrines, have a tendency to byass the judgment; and that men are led to think, or speak, favourably of such principles as have the public countenance, which, were they not thus circumstanced, they would hardly think worth their defending. That a diligent and an impartial enquiry after truth should be introductory to error, is as strange as that eye-sight should be dangerous to the traveller. ’Tis true, ministers are fallible, and often mistaken; but where shall there be a remedy found for this? Not surely, by obliging them to submit to, and follow, the dictates and prescriptions of men as frail and fallible as themselves. Nor will this method prevent that diversity of opinions, which the objection supposes so dangerous and hurtful: for, concerning, those very summaries, or articles, which were professedly intended to conserve and maintain the church in the unity of true religion, and in the bond of peace, \*

\* *Vid. Declaration prefixed to the xxxix. articles.*

peace, how widely have men differed ? Has not experience amply evinced, that these things are not sufficient for the pretended purpose ? Have they not been the very ground and cause of dissension and controversy, and of those unhappy differences which have, for so many hundred years, in different times and places, disturbed the church of Christ ? Nor is there any likelihood it will ever be otherwise, so long as this plan is pursued ; for 'tis more than probable that these things will ever be deemed exceptionable, in some respect or other. And if a minister comes to discern, or apprehend, that what he had assented to, as true, and agreeable to God's word, is not so, how ought he to behave ? If he continues outwardly to profess and maintain what he inwardly disbelieves, is he not chargeable with criminal prevarications and hypocrisy ? And if he resigns his office, as not tenable with a good conscience, must he not thereby offend the public, by declaring in the most significant manner, that he disapproves of the measures made use of ? In short : the proper question here, is ; — ' Whether Christ & his apostles have sufficiently, or as far

‘ as is consistent with the nature of man and  
‘ the nature of religion, consulted the peace  
‘ and safety of the church; or this was  
‘ left to the judgment and discretion of  
‘ after ages?’ It is extremely plain, that  
there neither is, nor can be, any other  
*bond of perfectness* among Christians, besides  
that so often mentioned, and so warmly re-  
commended in the New Testament, viz.  
*charity*, or a mutual forbearance and friendly  
disposition, notwithstanding some difference  
of sentiment. A sincere love of truth and  
of mankind will effectually prevent every  
thing injurious to either: and it is hoped it  
will not be thought any breach of it to say;  
— ‘ they who endeavour to raise alarms a-  
‘ gainst a free inquiry into the principles of  
‘ religion, as introductory to error and con-  
‘ fusion, are fearful without cause, and offi-  
‘ cious to bad purpose.’ Surely that temper  
and conduct which we find mentioned by  
the sacred writers with distinguishing marks  
of honor, can never be productive of such  
pernicious and fatal effects. Experience  
proves, that whatever tends to suppress or  
discourage an inquisitive disposition, tends  
also to the prejudice of truth, the corruption  
of

of religion, and the gendering of strifes. The only method to restore and secure unity and peace to the christian church is to recur to those generous and truly catholic principles, upon which its first founders so uniformly and scrupulously proceeded. To propose maintaining purity of faith, and uniformity of worship, among Christians, by obliging ministers to subscribe and swear to creeds and confessions of mere human composition, and enforcing the belief, or at least the continued profession of these, by penal sanctions, most will allow, is an ineligible scheme.

A late writer, indeed, observes, by way of illustrating, as he supposes, the expediency of subscription to explanatory articles, particular creeds, and formularies, that they who have complied with this method, " will " not have the boldnes, in open contradic- " tion to their recorded subscriptions, (which " they may, and, perhaps, hope, they shall " have occasion to repeat) and to those forms " which they are daily using, to oppose the " received faith. At, least, they will hardly " do it by express negatives, by open avowed " attacks,

“ attacks, but only by dark and doubling  
“ expressions, distant innuendos, and conse-  
“ quential arguments. This was the way  
“ of a late learned Doctor in his sermons:  
“ and had it not been for creeds and certain  
“ forms of prayer he was *muzzled* with, he  
“ would have been as unreserved in his dis-  
“ courses from the pulpit, as he is in his  
“ Scripture-Doctrine of the Trinity, and  
“ other writings \*.” One may safely sup-  
pose, that few of the sincere and judicious  
friends to liberty, learning and revelation,  
will be of this writer’s opinion: on the con-  
trary, they cannot but wish (with some de-  
gree of regret and resentment that it was not  
so) that the Doctor had been permitted and  
encouraged to speak his mind freely, and  
deliver his sentiments plainly: they cannot  
but lament that he, and other learned men,  
have been laid under such difficulties as  
tempted them to use *dark* and *doubling*, in-  
stead of clear and plain expressions; *in-  
nuendos*, instead of positive assertions; or  
*consequential*, instead of direct arguments.  
This very instance sets the imprudence and  
iniquity

\* Mr. *White’s* Appendix to his third letter to a dissent-  
ing gentleman.

iniquity of this *muzzling* scheme in the strongest point of light: and to reflect upon it, and others of the like nature, at the same time that it excites our indignation against all imposing and persecuting methods, ought to raise our gratitude to God, and to our temporal governors; to the kind providence of heaven, and to that illustrious prince, who, in the course of that providence, is set over us; among the many glories and blessings of whose reign, this is none of the least, that the rights of conscience are preserved sacred and inviolable. An unspeakable privilege it is, that they who, through pride or prejudice, may be inclined to do it, are not permitted to clap on *muzzles*, when and where they please.

And after all, who are they, who are most variable and inconsistent, say and unsay, one while advancing this doctrine, another while that? Whether they are such as inquire with freedom, examine with impartiality, and, with undaunted resolution, pursue truth through all it's consequences; or they are such, as have espoused certain human systems, enlisted themselves into some

particular party, and commenced advocates for a select set of opinions; let the thing itself speak. Who are they, who wrap up Christianity in mysteries, clouds, and darkness; or clog it with absurd and irreconcileable doctrines? Who are they, who, at one time, represent God as arbitrarily dooming a great part of mankind to endless misery; and, at another, warn men to *flee from the wrath to come*, plead the divine goodness and clemency, as a motive and encouragement to repentance, and *beseech them by the mercies of God*, that they would lead religious and holy lives? Who are they, who now assert the utter insignificancy of morality and virtue; and, anon, exhort their people to *maintain good works*, and inform them that *the grace of God has appeared to teach men that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, they should live soberly, righteously, and godlily in this present world*? Who are they, who, with one breath, affirm, that nothing we can do, does at all deserve the favor of God or future happiness; and, with the next, instruct their hearers, that by the careful cultivation of divine and social virtues, *an entrance shall be administred to them more abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our*

*Lord*

*Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ?* Do these inconsistencies and contradictions (with many more which might be enumerated) flow from a diligent and impartial study of the Scriptures, and an honest search after truth; or are they not rather to be imputed to indolence and inattention, or too close an attachment to some favourite systems, which men implicitly follow, unguardedly retail, and ignorantly jumble with, the pure principles of natural and revealed religion? What needs more? As truth is uniform and consistent, so there is but one way of coming at it, which is common to all mankind, *viz.* by the exercise of their rational faculties in the use of those means they may enjoy.

2.) It may be objected, that ministers, by speaking freely, oftentimes give offence, raise a disgust in people's minds, and thereby lessen their influence and usefulness; for which reason they had much better omit meddling with those points, the treating upon, and explaining which, they have ground to apprehend, will expose them to censure, without any probability of doing good.

To this it may be replied; — ‘ if men will become our enemies because we tell them the truth, according to the best of our judgment, but with the utmost gentleness and candour; if any will brand us with reproachful and obnoxious names, because we endeavour to make the best use we can, of our reason and Bible, and that with a view to their benefit; or refuse to attend upon our instructions, because we cannot inculcate what they would have us; they are blame-worthy, and not we.’ We wish, both for their sake and our own, the case was otherwise: but, bearing in mind the solemn engagements we are under, to declare the whole counsel of God, we trust, neither honor nor dishonor, evil report, nor good report, shall make us insincere or partial. We must be content to incur the displeasure of such, and sustain that load of calumny which an ignorant zeal may tempt them to cast upon us, rather than go contrary to our own consciences, and draw down upon ourselves the resentment of Almighty God. To proud and peevish bigots, who may endeavour to disturb our peace, wound our reputation,

tation, or distress us in our circumstances, we hope, we shall ever have the courage to say, *It is a very small thing with us, that we should be judged of you, or of man's judgment.* — *He, that judgeth us, is the Lord.* 1 Cor. iv. 3, 4. But, we are sometimes told; — ‘ those points, ‘ which are the most apt to give offence, may ‘ well enough be let alone, and yet you discharge your duty.’ Could this be satisfactorily made out, common prudence would teach and influence us to pass them over in silence. But are they deemed matters of so little importance as not to claim *our particular* notice? Are they not supposed and asserted to be *fundamental* and *essential* doctrines of the Gospel? And if we, on the other hand, believe them to be the mistakes, inventions, or corruptions of men, may we innocently suffer them to remain in credit with the world? If we are persuaded they are dishonourable to God, a reproach to Christianity, libels upon our common nature, and (in their obvious consequences) subversive of practical piety and virtue, can we be justified in omitting to expose them? Shall we not, by so doing, contribute to their establishment and progress? And if this is discharging

charging the office of watchmen, pastors, guides, and instructors, fidelity and honor are words without a meaning. Or if we could, with a good conscience, avoid *formally* laying open the falsehood of such doctrines, yet would not this secure us from the censures of these men, the good opinion and favor of whom this objection seems so much concerned to preserve. A zeal for what is commonly called *orthodoxy* is, for the most part, accompanied with suspicion and jealousy; and prompts those in whom it prevails to draw inferences to a minister's disadvantage, merely from his being *silent* upon such and such points, and from what he does *not say*, confidently conclude what his *real* sentiments are. Keeping in *generals* will not do the business: to stand fair with persons of this stamp, *particular* and *explicit* declarations are necessary; and their darling tenets must be frequently and warmly inculcated; be interwoven with, and made to *reign* and *triumph in*, every discourse: which can be *honestly* done by those only who are capable of believing them; which is far from being the case of all. But, — 'such is the temper of some men, that they

‘ they cannot bear this openness and freedom ?’ And why should they not be admonished to mend this temper ? Are they fulfilling the Apostle’s prediction by *not enduring*<sup>2</sup> Tim. iv. *sound doctrine* ? No, no ; *sound doctrine* they<sup>3</sup> can well endure, and wish for nothing more than that it might be generally maintained. But who must decide what *sound doctrine* is ? By what methods are our principles to be tried ? By reason and the Word of God ? To these we cheerfully submit ; and are al-<sup>1</sup> Pet. iii. ways ready to give an answer to every man,<sup>15</sup> who, in a good-natured and candid manner, may ask us a reason of our assertions, with all meekness and humility : but if by different standards, we appeal from them as unauthorized and fallacious : and if, for our so doing, any of our fellow-christians will be displeased and angry with us, we cannot help it. Finally ; it may be urged, — ‘ there is little or no probability of doing good, or working conviction.’ Does this absolve us from doing our duty ? Are we not to speak the truth, whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear ? What though some may remain unconvinced through the unhappy influence of inveterate prejudice ; may not

not others be enlightened, and enabled to think and judge in a more just and generous manner? Must error and absurdity be handed down from age to age, because a few are obstinately attached to them? Is this consulting the improvement of a rising generation, the happiness of posterity, or the purity and influence of the Christian religion? Is it thus we propose carrying on, or maintaining, what our ancestors bravely begun and prosecuted, *viz.* a Reformation from error and corruption in matters of religion?

I will embrace this opportunity of publicly declaring my great dislike of all temporizing methods, all ambiguous or evasive expressions, in the conversation or the discourses of ministers. That a proper regard ought to be had to the different tempers and capacities of those whom we are to instruct, is beyond all question; as also that we should express ourselves in such terms, truth and a good conscience being safe, as may be the least apt to give offence. Prudence and benevolence require this at our hands. But we are by no means authorised to deliver our sentiments, upon any subject, in

in so equivocal a manner, so that two persons of directly contrary opinions may both apprehend we are on their side of the question. Is it no more than honest prudence to express ourselves in such terms, as that, when we are attacked by one party, we can show they are capable of a very unobnoxious meaning, if not of one favourable to their scheme; and when called upon by another to explain them, make them bear a quite different sense? What is this but dissimulation and falsehood? At least, is it not such mean shuffling and tricking in religion, as none of common honesty can practise or approve of? Whatever seeming present advantage may attend such a proceeding, no good can come of it in the issue. '*Tis dé-<sup>2</sup> Tim. iii. ceiving, and being deceived.* And how far<sup>13.</sup> those heats and animosities, which so frequently disturb and distract our congregations, may be attributed to this, every one, who will be at the pains to examine a little into them, will easily determine. The laity should consider a spirit of free inquiry, both amongst themselves and their ministers, as their greatest glory and privilege; and not expect to be cockered in all their particular

notions ; and ministers express, both in publick and private, their perfect abhorrence of every thing bordering upon equivocation or trimming.

But I know to whom I speak : to a society of Christians who have, for a great number of years, had the most generous and catholic principles inculcated upon them, and that in the most advantageous manner, by one whose judgment, piety, and benevolence, rendered him a bright ornament to that honourable cause in which he was engaged ; and who was, by the blessing of God upon his extraordinary diligence and industry, the instrument of doing signal service to the interest of virtue and religion. \* You will allow

\* Mr. *Caleb Rotheram* was born, the 7th of *March*, 1694. at *Great Salkeld*, a pleasant village in *Cumberland*, situate upon the banks of the river *Eden*. He was instructed in the rudiments of grammatical and classical learning by Mr. *Anthony Ireland* ; at that time master of the free grammar-school at *Blencoe* ; and went through academical studies under the Rev. Dr. *Dixon*, at *Whitehaven*. In the year 1716. he accepted an invitation from the Protestant dissenting congregation at *Kendal*, and became their stated Pastor. In the year 1733. he began an academy, pursuant to the request of many of the most eminent among the Dissenters, both ministers and laity, for the instruction of youth in various branches of useful

low me to say, — ‘ You were distinguishingly favoured by fitting under the ministry of Dr. ROTHERAM, and if you have not made considerable proficiency in Christian knowledge you are less excusable than the generality.’ I mean not to upbraid you with carelessness or inattention ; nor to renew that grief which you felt upon being deprived of so excellent a pastor : your own conduct, I

H 2 hope,

useful literature ; but, principally, with a view to qualify them for the ministerial office : in the management of which, while his health continued, he was indefatigably diligent. He was solicitously and affectionately concerned for the improvement and usefulness of those under his care ; especially that they might be inspired with the love of liberty, and clearly understand the genuine principles of Christianity : and, in order to this, permitted encouraged, and assisted them to think freely upon every subject of natural and revealed religion. He took his degree of *Doctor in Divinity*, in the college of *Edinburgh*, the 27th of *May* 1743. when he published, and, in the usual forms of disputation, defended, a latin dissertation, *De Religionis Christianæ evidentiâ* : in which he clearly refuted that notion, that the probability of facts depending on human testimony, must gradually lessen in proportion to the distance of the time when they were done ; and, at last, become entirely evanescent. In the latter end of the year 1751. his health began to decline ; and the spring following he took a Journey to *Hexham*, in *Northumberland* ; where his eldest son, Dr. *John Rotheram*, is settled as a Physician ; and his friends were not without all hopes that he might be restored to his former strength and usefulness ; but his disorder returned, and he died there the 8th of *June*, 1752.

hope, will amply acquit you of the former ; and the prospect you have of being so happily supplied, in a great measure, suppress the latter. Suffer us to share in your joy, and congratulate you upon this occasion. We think you happy, and hope you think yourselves so, that the *son*, endowed with his *father's* talents, improved and refined by a liberal education, has consented to become your stated minister. We apprehend you have just cause of rejoicing ; that you ought to receive him in the *Lord* with all gladness ; and hold him in reputation. You cannot but acknowledge that he comes recommended to you by various peculiarly favourable and endearing circumstances : and give us leave to put you in mind ; — ‘ the world will judge, ‘ how far you have been sincere in your pro- ‘ fessions of respect for him who is gone, by ‘ the manner in which you behave towards ‘ his son and successor.’ But, to prevent any silly surmise, I must observe and plainly say, — ‘ there is little occasion, on his account, ‘ to urge any considerations of this nature ; ‘ for none, who are acquainted with him, ‘ can doubt whether he would not be ac- ‘ ceptable to, and esteemed by, absolute ‘ strangers ?

Phil. ii.  
28, 29.

‘strangers?’ ‘Tis with you, principally, they ought to be of weight; nor can you disregard them without being chargeable with great disingenuity. Disrespectful conduct on your part, (he continuing to act agreeable to his character) must be peculiarly disgusting and reproachful. But we are persuaded better things of you, though we thus speak; <sup>Heb. vi.</sup> even such things as shall gloriously evince<sup>9.</sup> your sense of honor and gratitude, your love of truth, and your zeal for pure and rational religion: and such things assure yourselves, will be accompanied with mutual pleasure and advantage here, and with mutual glory and rejoicing in the day of Christ.

To conclude: let us, who sustain the honourable character, and are employed in the important office, of ministers, *renounce the* <sup>2 Cor. iv.</sup> *hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in* <sup>2</sup> *craftiness, nor handling the word of God de-*  
*ceitfully; and, by manifestation of the truth,* *commend ourselves to every man’s conscience in* *the sight of God:* and let those, who are professedly desirous of being instructed, *lay* <sup>1</sup> *Pet. ii.* *aside all malice, and all guile, hypocrisy, envy,* <sup>1, 2.</sup> *and evil speaking; and, with simplicity and*  
*sincerity,*

sincerity, receive the word that they may grow thereby. May integrity and uprightness guide and protect us all! and our enlarging knowledge and understanding be accompanied with an higher esteem, a profounder reverence, and a more ardent love, of the God of truth; with more extensive and intense benevolence and charity towards men; and with improving purity of heart and life in ourselves! *Amen!* 5 OC59

T H E E N D.

